

leading social strata of the Empire, the Junkers and the masters of heavy industry, who now buried their long-smoldering feud. The result was what has been called "the feudalization of industry" and "the capitalization of agriculture." Most of the industrial bourgeoisie abandoned much of its liberalism and acquiesced in "feudal" values — a process brilliantly analyzed by Kehr; most of the Junkers began to accept an Empire which they had hitherto disliked as an "abandonment of Prussia" after Bismarck began working closely with the Liberals in 1866. The high German agrarian tariff became a classic case of an economically and socially obsolete class, the Junkers, using their political power to buttress a sagging economic position. The industrialists were pleased, on the other hand, by a political system which rigorously excluded both Left Liberals and Socialists from power and by a system of taxation that was sharply regressive in its incidence.

These flaws — to which one could easily add the polarization of German society and the alienation of the working class — were, of course, built into the very structure of the Bismarckian Empire from its beginning; but they were all accentuated by the developments of 1879. The shift to protection promoted and symbolized the consolidation of an anachronistic political system based upon an anachronistic social constellation; but it also provided sufficient political and parliamentary strength for the ruling class to govern Germany securely for the next thirty-nine years. There was no danger of an internal overthrow in time of peace — in fact the Imperial structure could be overthrown only in 1918, and then under such aggravating circumstances (defeat in war, stab-in-the-back legend, capitulating to Wilsonian Liberalism, and so on) as to compromise heavily the democratic parliamentary progressive regime of Weimar which succeeded it. It should never be forgotten that the numerous and conspicuous faults of the Republic were largely the result of the too-long survival of the anachronistic Bismarckian political and social system. To the understanding of this fundamental fact, Böhme's book makes a well-documented contribution; his book is in fact a pioneering achievement in the too-long-neglected field of German social history.

— KLAUS EPSTEIN

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### BEAUTY AND THE POLITICAL BEAST\*

Shelley claimed — at least in his case, mistakenly — that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. Most poets today would doubtless share Louis MacNeice's perception of the poet as neither a legislator, however unacknowledged, nor a prophet. Very few poets have been found in the corridors of power, and it is unlikely that poetic skill is a prerequisite for political success. Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Politics* are, after all, rather different works. Ezra Pound's

\* C. M. Bowra: *Poetry & Politics 1900-1960*. (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1966. Pp. viii, 157. \$4.95.)

foreign policy and T. S. Eliot's social policy are at least two miseries whose implementation the twentieth century has been spared. Furthermore, most political leaders would probably find Shelley's statement not only inaccurate but laughable.

There is, nevertheless, a very profound sense in which poetry and politics are related. Herman Finer went so far as to assert that all politics, in the end, is poetry. Our political values, in his interpretation, stem from the same depths of being as the magic lines of *Hamlet* and *Faust*. Indeed, Finer saw the state itself as one of mankind's myths, and not the least noble or beautiful. It is certainly true that poets can reflect and create attitudes of political significance. Some of the worst poetry, for instance, that found in many national anthems, is required reading for the student of politics. No student of international organization can ignore Dag Hammarskjöld's *Markings*, even though the poetic content of the latter may be inferior. It is significant that so eminent a "scientific" student of politics as Karl Deutsch ended a recent textbook account of German politics with a moving discussion of "the political dreams of the new German literature."

Late in life Robert Frost observed: "I used to be interested in the politics of poetry; in my old age I am getting interested in the poetry of politics." C. M. Bowra, not yet of Frost's venerable age, is obviously still interested in the former rather than the latter subject. It is Bowra's contentions that in the twentieth century "poets can hardly be expected to keep clear of politics in the general sense of contemporary public affairs" (p. 1). This seemingly innocent statement is both inaccurate and inconsistent with Bowra's later argument. Implicit in this definition of politics is the assumption that "political" is not identical with "partisan" — Bowra is not concerned with party hacks of any complexion who happen to write verse, but with serious artists who are deeply concerned about the world outside their art. It is worth noting that Bowra often uses "political" where many students of politics would use "social."

Political poetry is, for Bowra, entirely possible and legitimate. "The essence of this poetry is that it deals with events which concern a large number of people and can be grasped not as immediate, personal experience but as matters known largely from hearsay and presented in simplified and often abstract forms. It is thus the antithesis of all poetry which deals with the special, individual activity of the self and tries to present this as specially and individually as it can" (p. 2). The political poet "attempts to grasp and interpret a vast present" (p. 2). The nineteenth century was, not surprisingly, the high point of political poetry. In that century political poets were so sure of their main assumptions that they could apply these assumptions to current events with an impressive artistic conviction (p. 5). Even before 1914, this self-confidence of political poets had become uncertain (pp. 31-32), but the Great War completely destroyed it, like so many other aspects of European life.

Into the intellectual vacuum created by the Great War stepped

temporarily the prophetic poetry of artists like Yeats and Blok, much of it written in true prophetic style, before 1914. If, before 1914, one could envision the Great War (and here Bowra certainly exaggerates the degree to which the latter was foreseen), during the war one could envision even greater wars in the future. Nowhere was the change from, say, Tennyson more evident than in Wilfred Owen's preface to his own poetry, which Bowra surprisingly does not quote:

This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them.

Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honor, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War.

Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.

My subject is War, and the pity of War.

The Poetry is in the pity.

Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory.

They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.

Most of the Europeans who were then alive had no personal experience of trench warfare, and the war poetry of truthful and sensitive young men was a major means of educating a larger public to the agony of that warfare. As C. Day Lewis observed: "The subject made the poet: the poet made poems which radically changed our attitude towards war." Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden are, although Bowra does not say so, an integral part of the history of British politics in the twentieth century. Because of their poetry, the political values of educated Britons could never again be precisely those of Rudyard Kipling and Rupert Brooke. Bowra's analysis of prophetic poetry in Russia immediately before, during, and immediately after the Revolution is, in particular, brilliantly persuasive. Today, according to Bowra, prophetic poetry is very rare, partly at least because it is essentially a religious art which no longer appeals to the modern spirit (pp. 66-67). This explanation sounds reasonable, but it is difficult to reconcile it with Bowra's own (correct) argument (p. 67) that prophetic poetry has been missing in most centuries, including presumably a good many when the "modern spirit" was also missing.

Bowra's greatest problem, however — and one which remains unresolved for the most part — arises from the fact that in the last four decades "poetry has steadily moved from conscious majesty and a cosmic outlook to the careful presentation of private sensations and states of mind" (p. 70). If this is so, how is political poetry possible at all? Bowra does not come to grips with this fundamental question. Instead of summarizing the admittedly atypical political poetry of a few artists, Bowra might have explained how it was that poets came to withdraw from writing political poetry, and what were the consequences of this withdrawal for both poetry and politics. This

kind of analysis, of course, would approach perilously close to the sociology of knowledge, and for this task Bowra is clearly not equipped. The name on the title page is, after all, not Karl Mannheim.

Although there is a good deal of verbal tergiversation, it is clear what Bowra's politics are: poetry over politics. "The inner sanctuary of the creative self has to be preserved from desecrating intrusions, and public affairs may enter it only if they enrich it and keep it to its unique task" (p. 74). The true poet "speaks of his own feelings because he must and not because it may help others" (p. 125). This may be an admirable vocation, whatever one may feel about narcissism, but it is undeniably apolitical and perhaps even asocial. According to Bowra, however, after modern poetry reaches its self-appointed goal of reasserting the complete individual artistic integrity of the poet, completely honest political poetry will finally be possible. "Poets, having refashioned their art on truth to their feelings and precision in the expression of them, have slowly and tentatively begun to treat public affairs with more sweep and confidence" (p. 95). Seferis and Quasimodo are presented as examples of such a creative synthesis of inner and outer worlds. While these two particular examples may not be entirely reassuring, it may well be that Bowra's optimism is justified, and that poets soon will be teaching us students of politics as intensively as novelists are presently doing. Only a poet is entitled to evaluate Bowra's statement: "Poetry on public events has as much right to exist as poetry on any other subject, since it helps us to grasp them from unexpected angles and to treat them seriously without yielding to the humbling influence of lower methods of communication" (p. 137). Perhaps a student of politics may, however, join in Bowra's conclusion, that poetry "may yet decide that public affairs are not so alien and recalcitrant as it now tends to think, and pay more attention to them. If it does, we may be rewarded by a fuller, more eager, and more sensitive consciousness of what happens in the world to which we belong" (p. 138). Perhaps, after all, beauty has something to teach us about power?

— MARVIN RINTALA

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### THE UNDERGROUND OF NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR\*

At the end of Lionel Trilling's novel, *The Middle of the Journey*, Gifford Maxim, an ex-communist turned religious reactionary, says to John Laskell, the protagonist: "Like any bourgeois intellectual, you want to make the best of every possible world and every possible view. Anything to avoid a commitment, anything not to have to take a risk." In essence, this is the criticism that has been frequently made of George Orwell by such leftist writers as Isaac Deutscher, John

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\* George Woodcock: *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966. Pp. 366. \$6.95.)